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ABSTRACT

The paper investigates how adult immigrants with low literacy levels are being taught language skills in Northern Virginia and the District of Columbia. Particular attention is paid to the reasons why large English-as-a-Second-Language programs (ESL) in the area do not offer native language literacy (NLL) courses and why some students seek NLL instruction. This research should be useful to city and country administrators in their ongoing development of adult education programs, as well as to churches and other nonprofit organizations that help address the educational needs of the local immigrant population. It is concluded that it is difficult for learners lacking NLL to succeed in ESL courses. For students who are impatient to learn English, ESL courses may be the best option. Moreover, for many students speaking languages other than Spanish, ESL courses may be the only option. However, a student who has low literacy skills, or who is apprehensive about going to school, may be much better served by an NLL course. Opportunities to obtain NLL courses are very limited in Northern Virginia and the District of Columbia, even for Spanish speakers. Three appendices are also included: "Native Language Literacy Survey for Programs That Offer Native Language Literacy Instruction"; "Native Language Literacy Survey for ESL Programs That Do Not Offer Native Language Literacy Instruction"; and "Programs Participating in Survey." (Contains 33 references.) (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education) (KFT)

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Meeting the Language Needs of Low-Literacy Adult Immigrants in Washington, D.C. and Suburban Northern Virginia

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Introduction

Many non-English speaking adult immigrants living in the United States and Canada today lack basic literacy skills in their native languages. Such adults have disproportionately high drop-out and failure rates in English as a Second Language (ESL) courses, and some are too intimidated even to attempt to study English. Moreover, low literacy skills limit the ability of these adult immigrants to participate in important aspects of community life within their own immigrant communities.

Some learning centers have responded to the needs of these adults by offering literacy classes in English, while others provide native language literacy (NLL) instruction. Researchers working with children have long theorized that the underlying skills acquired by learners in their native languages can ultimately be transferred to English (Cummins, 1983; Cummins, 1986; Cummins & Swain, 1986). This theory also has relevance for adults, as supported by national surveys of NLL programs (Cook & Quiñones, 1983; Gillespie, 1994), a survey of programs in Massachusetts (LaLyre, 1995), and anecdotal reports from successful NLL programs operating in New York City (Rivera, 1999a; Rivera, 1999c), Arlington, Virginia (Osterling, Violand-Sánchez & von Vacano, 1999), the Boston metropolitan area (Brown, 1996; Auerbach, 1996), and Chicago (Gutierrez, 1988). Evidence from these and other programs suggests that adults with low literacy skills may be more successful ESL learners if they are first provided with NLL instruction. In addition, first language literacy education has been shown by itself to enhance the

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lives of immigrants within their family units and their ethnic communities (Auerbach, 1996; Rivera, 1999c).

Although large immigrant populations reside within the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area, little is known about the literacy levels of the adults in these communities or about the services that are available to them. The purpose of this study was to investigate how adult immigrants with low literacy skills are being taught language skills in suburban Northern Virginia and the District of Columbia. Particular attention was paid to: (1) the reasons why large ESL programs in the area do or do not offer NLL courses, and (2) why some students seek NLL instruction. This paper describes the results of a survey of ESL and NLL programs in Washington, D.C.; the City of Alexandria, Virginia; and the counties of Arlington and Fairfax, Virginia. This research may be useful to city and county administrators in their ongoing development of adult education programs, as well as to churches and other non-profit organizations that help to address the educational needs of the local immigrant population.

Literature Review

The ESL Population

Data from the 1990 census and the 1993 National Adult Literacy Survey suggest that the number of adults in the United States with limited English proficiency is between 12 and 14 million (Wagner & Venesky, 1999). National figures are not available as to how many of these adults lack basic reading skills in their native language (Rivera, 1999b). Information available for New York State, however, indicates that about 22 percent of the adult ESL students living in that state in 1990, and approximately 27 percent of the adult ESL students living in New York City, could not read or write in their native language (United States Department of Education,

1991). Illiteracy rates may be even higher for adult immigrants who do not enroll in ESL classes. Certainly, the evidence suggests that nationwide more than one million immigrants with limited knowledge of English may also lack basic literacy skills in their native language.

According to a national study of federally-supported adult education programs, approximately 69 percent of adult ESL students in the U.S. in 1992 were Hispanic, while 19 percent were Asian (Fitzgerald, 1995). A more recent estimate of the percentage of adult ESL students who are Hispanic is 55 percent (U.S. Department of Education, 1999, cited in Rivera, 1999b). About 85 percent of adult ESL students in 1992 were living in major metropolitan areas (Fitzgerald, 1995). These figures indicate that nearly half of all adult ESL students are Spanish-speakers living in major cities, who might be served with programs conducted in whole or in part in Spanish. In fact, the vast majority of NLL programs identified in a 1991 national survey were taught in Spanish (Gillespie, 1994).

Data collected locally during the 2000 Census also indicate that a large percentage of adult ESL students in the Washington metropolitan area are Spanish speakers. In Fairfax County, the Hispanic population grew from 1990 to 2000 from 6 percent to 11 percent; at the same time, a diverse Asian population grew from 8 percent to 13 percent (Branigin, 2001). A recent study by the Brookings Institution of legal immigration into the Washington metropolitan area between 1990 and 1998 found that 31.5 percent of legal immigrants were from Latin America, while 42 percent were from Asia, including the Middle East, and 16.2 percent were from Africa (Sheridan & Cohn, 2001). Both studies indicate that a large percentage of immigrants into the metropolitan area are Spanish speakers, but that the local immigrant population as a whole is extremely diverse.

Low-Literacy Adult Immigrants and ESL

"Literacy" can mean different things in different contexts. For the ESL instructional context, Guth and Wrigley (1992) have suggested that any student who is not able to make "normal progress" in ESL classes because of "difficulty with written language" (p. 5) might be considered an ESL literacy student. Similarly, this paper uses the terms "non-literate" and "low-literacy" to refer to ESL students who cannot read or write in their native languages or having difficulty doing so.

Ample evidence was collected in a national survey reported by Gillespie (1994) that adult immigrants who cannot read or write in their native languages have the most difficulty succeeding in adult ESL classes, even those designed as ESL literacy classes. Based on her own survey of NLL and ESL programs throughout Massachusetts, LaLyre (1995) also found that ESL students without NLL are "among the students who make little or no progress at the lower levels" (p. 20). Brown (1996) reported, for example, that the Spanish NLL program at Centro Hispano de Chelsea in Massachusetts was initiated in 1991 after administrators of the ESL program discovered that some students were repeating classes two or more times, and most of those repeaters were in the lower-level classes. When all the students in the lower classes were asked to write a paragraph in Spanish, it was discovered that the students who had written the poorer-developed paragraphs and made the most mistakes were invariably students who had repeated in the lower level at least twice. This led program administrators to conclude that some students might be more successful in ESL classes if they first acquired basic literacy skills in Spanish.

Similarly, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, a bilingual program in Hmong and English was

begun in 1989 specifically to address the slow academic progress of low-literacy students in ESL and basic skills classes (Gillespie, 1994). In Chicago, Casa Aztlán added NLL courses to its adult education program in 1985 after a needs assessment found that a majority of its drop-out students could not read or write in their native languages (Gillespie, 1994).

Reportedly, one third of all adult ESL students drop out of classes before the end of the second month (Development Associates, 1994, cited in Brod, 1995). A study of attrition in urban literacy programs found that numerous factors contribute to poor retention rates in adult education:

> *Personal factors* include low self-esteem coupled with lack of demonstrable progress; daily pressures from work and home problems of schedule, childcare, and transportation; lack of support of the native culture and family culture for education; and the age of the learner.
>
> *Program factors* include lack of appropriate materials for low-level learners; lack of opportunity to achieve success; lack of flexibility in class scheduling; classes so multilevel that those with no literacy skills are mixed with those quite literate (or those with very high oral skills are mixed with those with vary low oral skills); lack of peer support and reinforcement; and instructional materials that are not relevant to learners' needs and lives (Brod, 1995, p. 2).

Some of these factors may be particularly influential in the case of low-literacy students in the ESL environment: low self-esteem, lack of support from native culture or family culture; and mixing of students with varying levels of literacy. In addition, students with low NLL are likely to lack the general academic skills required of a successful learner. Indeed, administrators of the school system in Broward County, Florida, which offers NLL courses in Creole and Spanish, have observed that adults lacking NLL "often lack basic academic skills and the self-confidence to succeed in ESOL classes" (Broward County Schools, 1995, p. 141).

While numerous factors are at work, non-literate ESL students are uniquely handicapped

by in their inability to read or write simple words in their native language. Even when ESL instruction is entirely oral, the inability to take notes in class or look up words in the dictionary increases the memory burden on non-literate students and makes active learning more difficult (Klassen, 1991). Low-literacy students are at an even greater disadvantage when they are placed in ESL classes designed for literate students. Klassen (1991) chronicled their difficulties in his report on interviews with minimally-educated Latin American adults living in Toronto:

> Maria, for example, told me that, although she learned a few words of vocabulary, her experience of going to ESL classes merely involved copying letters and words she couldn't understand while she either worried about family problems or struggled to stay awake. . . . Similarly, Rebeca described and showed me English exercises she finally could copy in a rough print she had been learning from friends at home, but she could read almost nothing of what she had so painstakingly copied. The benefit, therefore, for her was not practice with the grammar and vocabulary on the page, but simply forming the letters. . . . (p. 8).

English Literacy Instruction

English literacy programs can address the learning needs of these students (Guth & Wrigley, 1992; Wrigley, 1993). The most successful of these programs use a communicative approach to teaching and develop a curriculum based on the principle that "literacy education is most effective if it is tied to the lives of the learners and reflects their experiences as community members, parents, and participants in the workforce" (Wrigley, 1993, p. 1). One such program is the Arlington Education and Employment Program (REEP) in Arlington County, Virginia, which has been recognized for its "creative approach to working with competency-based curricula," its low drop-out rates, and its high student promotion rates (Guth & Wrigley, 1992, p. 243). Students in REEP's literacy classes set the curriculum for each class, based on an assessment of their particular communicative needs and goals (Shank & Terrill, 1997).

English literacy instruction may be the only feasible option for a program that must serve students of diverse language backgrounds. In a typical REEP ESL literacy class of 24 students, for example, the students may speak as many as ten different languages (Shank & Terrill, 1997). Furthermore, it may be difficult politically to obtain public funds for NLL programs, either because they address the needs of only certain language groups or simply because they do not focus from the outset on English literacy.

NLL Instruction

Researchers have concluded, however, that NLL instruction is the best approach for some low-literacy adults, particularly those who have had little formal education and speak little English (Auerbach, 1993; Auerbach, 1996; Wrigley, 1993; Wrigley & Guth, 1992). Some adults who lack literacy skills do not have the self confidence to enroll in educational programs offered in English. For example, the East Boston Harborside Community Center discovered that a "previously hidden population of immigrants with limited educational backgrounds . . . had been too intimidated to come to a school setting" (Auerbach, 1996, p. 5) until they were required to enroll in ESL classes as a condition for amnesty. Cook and Quiñones (1983) found that half of the students in the Spanish literacy programs included in their national survey had no previous experience attending school, and 37 percent more had attended school for five years or less. Students who otherwise might not be served by any language program, because classes offered in English may be too intimidating or too difficult, can be reached by programs that begin with NLL instruction (e.g., Gillespie, 1994).

In addition, students who learn to read using a language that they already know receive important feedback that is missed by students learning to read in a new language:

> English speakers making initial attempts at reading understand, if they are successful, the products of their efforts. They read words they know and sentences they understand. They can use context and probabilities effectively, and they can self-correct efficiently. Non-English speakers have much less basis for knowing whether their reading is correct because the crucial meaning-making process is short circuited by lack of language knowledge (Committee on the Prevention of Reading Difficulties in Young Children, 1998, p. 237).

The availability of this feedback and the opportunity to ask questions in one's native language make the learning process not only easier but less intimidating. For Spanish speakers, an additional advantage is that the alphabet's sound-symbol correspondence is less complicated in Spanish than in English (Klassen, 1991). Students who first become competent readers in Spanish may find it easier to cope eventually with English spelling.

It is also easier for students in a NLL course to contribute their life experiences and insights to the educational process; thus, use of native language facilitates learner-centered curriculum development (Auerbach, 1996). Many NLL programs are based on Brazilian educator Paulo Freire's "sociocontextual orientation" to adult literacy education (Spener, p. 76). Freire (1972) advocates a "problem-posing" approach to learning through which students "develop their power to perceive critically *the way they exist* in the world" (pp. 70-71). Obviously, the use of a language in which they are fluent will allow students to participate at a more sophisticated level in such a program. The success of one Freirean NLL program, El Barrio Popular Education Program in New York City, is well-documented in the literature (Guth & Wrigley, 1992; Rivera, 1999a; Rivera, 1999c; Wrigley & Guth, 1992).

While some students and educators view NLL instruction as postponing unnecessarily the acquisition of English, evidence from studies of children support the "common underlying

proficiency principle" (Cummins, 1983, p.376) long advocated by Cummins (e.g., Cummins, 1986; Cummins & Swain, 1986). This generally accepted thesis holds that instruction in one's first language not only develops skills in that language but also develops "a deeper conceptual and linguistic proficiency" (Cummins, 1983, p. 376) that can be transferred to a second language. In other words, some underlying proficiencies are cross-lingual, and instruction in one language will enhance a student's proficiency in another. In order for such benefits to occur, however, the student must attain a threshold level of proficiency in both languages (Cummins & Swain, 1986).

Studies comparing the outcomes of different instructional treatments of immigrant children support the conclusion that students who are given the opportunity to attain advanced skills in their native language ultimately acquire a level of English proficiency that is higher than that attained by students whose native language development is cut short by "early exit" from a bilingual program (e.g., Collier, 1995; Ramírez, Pasta, Yuen, Ramey & Billings, 1991, cited in Cummins, 1992; and García-Vázquez, Vázquez, López, and Ward, 1997). Weaker support is available from other kinds of studies. For example, testing of a random selection of Hispanic students in grades six through twelve in a midwestern school district revealed significant correlations between Spanish proficiency and achievement scores in English skills (García-Vázquez et al., 1997). The investigators in this study did not appear to have considered the possibility, however, that other factors such as social literacy or the total number of years a student had spent in school correlated as well as the student's Spanish proficiency level with his or her English achievement scores. Similarly, a recent longitudinal study of Finnish children learning English as a foreign language revealed that phonological memory, word recognition

skills in Finnish, and comprehension skills in Finnish in the second grade explained 58 percent of the variance in English proficiency achieved by the end of the third grade, with word recognition skills being the strongest predictor (Dufva & Voeten, 1999). Again, however, there appears to have been no control for other factors, such as a student's overall success in the school environment.

Little empirical data is available on adult second language learners to support the common underlying proficiency principle. However, educators of adults have observed repeatedly that the metalinguistic knowledge and vocabulary acquired during the study of one's native language is very helpful to a student learning a second language (Auerbach, 1996; Gillespie, 1994; Klassen, 1991).

Moreover, in addition to facilitating the eventual learning of English, literacy in one's native language has considerable value of its own. The ability to write letters to family and friends in one's native country is very important to many immigrants (Auerbach, 1996; Klassen, 1991). Furthermore, many immigrants live in large enclaves where virtually all aspects of daily life can successfully be conducted in their native languages (Gillespie, 1994). However, poor skills in one's native language can limit an immigrant's participation in his native community and even serve as a source of embarrassment and alienation (Klassen,1991).

The obvious disadvantage of studying NLL is that it delays or reduces time immediately available for learning English. Some programs address student concerns in this regard by including both ESL and NLL instruction in the same classes (the "bilingual" model); other programs provide separate ESL classes for students who are taking NLL classes (the "coordinate" model) (Gillespie, 1994; Wrigley & Guth, 1992). Another problem for NLL

literacy programs is that they have greater difficulty than ESL programs in obtaining financial support, since the value of these programs in helping immigrants adapt to life in the United States is less obvious than that of ESL programs (Gillespie, 1994; Rivera, 1999b). Administrators of NLL programs also report that it is hard to find published teaching materials that are age-appropriate and culturally-appropriate; most Spanish literacy texts, for example, are designed for children or for use in rural settings in Latin American countries rather than for adults living in urban America (Auerbach, 1996; Gillespie, 1994; LaLyre, 1995).

Method

The present study was conducted in November and December of 2000. Two survey forms were prepared for the study: one for programs that offer NLL instruction (provided in Appendix A) and one for programs that offer ESL instruction but not NLL instruction (provided in Appendix B). The study included four programs offered by the public school systems in four adjoining local jurisdictions -- the District of Columbia, the City of Alexandria, and the counties of Arlington and Fairfax, Virginia -- as well as a program operated by the Department of Human Services in Alexandria. Also included were six private non-profit ESL programs, including those most widely known to the academic ESL community in the four localities studied: Arlington Family Literacy, the Literacy Council of Northern Virginia, Hogar Hispano (in Fairfax County), Language ETC (in DC), Spanish Education Development Center (in DC), and Sacred Heart Adult Education Center (in DC).

Someone affiliated with each program, in most cases the program director, was contacted by telephone. That person or a designee was then either interviewed by telephone using a survey form or was sent a survey form by email. All eleven organizations contacted provided

information for the study. Ultimately, information was obtained from four programs that offer NLL instruction and seven programs that offer ESL instruction but not NLL instruction. The programs participating in the survey were as follows:

Programs Offering Native Language Literacy Instruction

- **Public-Supported Programs**

  Hispanic Orientation and Education Program
  Alexandria Department of Human Services
  Alexandria, Virginia

  Carlos Rosario International Career Center and Public Charter School
  Washington, D.C.

- **Private Non-Profit Program**

  Family Literacy Program
  Arlington Mill Community Center
  Arlington, Virginia

  Language Education and Technology Center (Language ETC)
  Washington, D.C.

ESL Programs Not Offering Native Language Literacy Instruction

- **Public-Supported Programs**

  Alexandria Adult Basic Education
  Alexandria Public Schools

  Arlington Education and Employment Program (REEP)
  Arlington Public Schools

  Office of Adult ESL
  Fairfax County Public Schools

- **Private Non-Profit Programs**

  Hogar Hispano

Fairfax County

Literacy Council of Northern Virginia
Falls Church, Virginia

Sacred Heart Adult Education Center
Washington, D.C.

Spanish Education Development (SED) Center
Washington, D.C.

The survey form for programs offering NLL focused on two areas of inquiry. One concerned the administrative characteristics of the program, such as numbers of students, qualifications of teachers, sources of instructional materials, and financial support. The second area pertained to the pedagogical reasons for initiating the program, the reasons students have for wanting to participate, and the value program administrators now ascribe to the achievement of NLL. The survey form for ESL programs that do not offer NLL focused on how these programs serve non-literate ESL students, whether those students are able to succeed as English language learners, and why the programs do not offer NLL instruction. Multiple choice answers were offered for most questions on the survey, making it relatively easy to tally the results.

Each organization contacted was asked about the possible existence of any NLL programs in the area. Additional efforts to locate NLL programs included a literature search and inquiries with the Center for Applied Linguistics. Unfortunately, the four NLL programs found through these efforts were limited to Spanish. Therefore, the results provide no information as to community-based programs that may be providing NLL instruction to the Vietnamese, Korean, Middle Eastern, or other large immigrant populations in the area. This study also did not include the Maryland counties that adjoin the District of Columbia, although those counties

include substantial immigrant populations. Consequently, even as to Spanish-speakers, the results do not provide a complete profile of services available in the Washington metropolitan area. An additional shortcoming of the study is that information about specific programs was gathered only from program administrators. Possible avenues for future study would include expanding the data collection to Maryland, attempting to contact community-based programs in non-Hispanic ethnic enclaves, interviewing NLL students to determine what benefits they have experienced from NLL instruction, and interviewing students in regular ESL programs to determine how many of those students might be interested in NLL instruction.

Results and Analysis

As noted above, only four NLL programs were found in this study. All of these programs offer NLL in Spanish only. The survey results for NLL programs are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Native Language Literacy Programs

	Alexandria Hispanic Orientation	*Arlington Family Literacy*	*Carlos Rosario (D.C.)*	*Language ETC*
1 years in operation	3	5	>20	8
2 languages in which instruction is offered	Spanish	Spanish	Spanish/ English	Spanish
3 number of students currently enrolled in NLL classes	<5	n/a	>40	21-40
4 size of classes	<5	11-20	11-20	5-10
5 able to serve all students who wish to enroll?	yes	yes	no	yes
6 level of NLL typically achieved in reading and writing	<3rd grade	<3rd grade	3rd grade	1st to 3rd
7 impetus for program (ranked in order of importance)				
a non-literate students failing in ESL classes	#1	#3	#1	#1

	Alexandria Hispanic Orientation	*Arlington Family Literacy*	*Carlos Rosario (D.C.)*	*Language ETC*
b non-literate students failing in literacy classes in English		#4	#2	
c prospective students requested		#2	#4	
d community leaders requested		#1	#3	
8 student motivation for achieving native language literacy (ranked in order of importance)				
a to succeed in ESL	#1	#4	#3	
b to write letters to family and friends in native country	#3	#1	#4	#2
c to communicate with children's teachers and school authorities	#2	#2	#1	
d to participate more fully in church/read the Bible	#5	#5	#5	#1
e to participate more fully in other ways in the local community	#4	#3	#2	
9 description of instructors				
a Spanish-native volunteers	x	x		x (most)
b Spanish-native professionally-trained literacy specialists		x	x (aide)	
c salaried instructors who are not professionally-trained literacy specialists and who speak English as a first language			x	
d volunteers who are fluent in Spanish				x (one)
10 training provided to instructors by the program	<5 hours	n/a	n/a	5-10 hrs
11 sources for instructional materials				
a created commercially in the U.S. for adults			x	x
b created abroad	x	x		x
c designed specifically for program		x	x	x
12 study of ESL				

	Alexandria Hispanic Orientation	*Arlington Family Literacy*	*Carlos Rosario (D.C.)*	*Language ETC*
a. program's literacy students have not successfully studied ESL	x			
b. ESL instruction integrated with literacy instruction			x	
c. ESL after reaching a certain proficiency in Spanish		x		x

Only the District of Columbia has a large, publicly-supported NLL program. This program, which is run by the Carlos Rosario International Career Center and Public Charter School, has been in operation for more than 20 years. It has more than 40 students in classes of eleven to twenty students each and does not have sufficient resources to accommodate all students who wish to take classes. Classes are conducted in both English and Spanish, with the primary instructor using English and an aide working with Spanish-speakers in Spanish. The program uses instructional materials created specifically for its own use as well as materials created commercially in the U.S. The level of NLL achieved by its students is approximately third grade. NLL instruction is integrated with ESL instruction. This program is supported by foundation grants as well as resources from the public school system.

Another large NLL program is operated in the District of Columbia by Language ETC, a non-profit organization supported by student tuition payments, foundation grants, individual donations, and the Catholic Church. NLL classes are conducted entirely in Spanish, using commercially-produced texts from Chile and the United States and other materials created locally specifically for the program. Language ETC enrolls between 21 and 40 NLL students at any one time and is able to accept all NLL students who apply. The students typically achieve

no more than a third grade level of NLL proficiency before they switch to ESL classes. All the instructors are volunteers. Language ETC conducts classes four evenings a week and on Saturdays and Sundays with five to ten students in the NLL classes.

In Alexandria, the Department of Human Services operates a large beginning-level ESL program for Hispanics that includes a very small NLL component, serving less than 5 NLL students in one small class conducted by two volunteers who are native Spanish speakers. Class is conducted two evenings a week using materials created in Latin America. This program does not turn NLL students away; however, the availability of NLL instruction through this program is not publicized within the Hispanic community. Students are simply placed in the NLL class when they attempt to enroll in ESL classes and are found to have extremely low literacy skills in Spanish. The students in this program typically do not achieve a third grade level of NLL and do not move on successfully to regular ESL classes.

In Arlington, the League of United Latin American Citizens sponsors a family literacy program with assistance from the Mexican Embassy, George Mason University, and the Arlington Public Schools (Osterling et al., 1999). This Saturday program provides instruction in reading, writing, and math to an average of 10 adults weekly, who attend the program with their children. Classes are taught by professionals and volunteers who are native Spanish speakers, using materials from abroad and materials created specifically for the program (see Osterling et al., 1999, regarding curriculum development). The students typically do not reach a third grade level of NLL before they switch to regular ESL classes. Although this program does not turn any students away, it appears likely that many students who might take advantage of the program are

not aware of it; none of the Virginia ESL educators contacted for this study and asked about NLL programs mentioned this one.

As to the value of NLL instruction, the director of the Alexandria program, whose training and expertise are in social services rather than education, as well as an ESL consultant to the Arlington family literacy program opined that NLL should be offered because it is too difficult for adults to learn English without first acquiring literacy in their native language. The director of Language ETC observed in her written response to the survey questionnaire that NLL instruction is superior to ESL instruction for introducing low-literacy adults from rural Latin America to the value of education and "convincing them that they are not too dumb or old (their words) to learn." She was unconcerned about the delay in these students learning English, because "students acquire skills while learning their native language that are easily transferable in the process of learning a foreign language."

The Arlington Family Literacy program was initiated as a result of requests from community leaders and prospective students for a Spanish literacy program, and the primary goals of its students are to be able to write letters to family and friends in their native countries and communicate with local school authorities in Spanish. The primary reason for initiating the other three local NLL programs was that low-literacy adults were failing in ESL classes; however, program administrators of two of those programs believe that the students are motivated primarily by a desire to be literate in Spanish, either to communicate with their children's teachers and other school authorities or to participate more fully in their local communities (Carlos Rosario) or to participate more fully in church, read the Bible, or write letters home (Language ETC). These results are consistent with the findings of Auerbach

(1996), Gillespie (1994), and Klassen (1991) that NLL is by itself an important goal for some immigrants, the achievement of which can substantially enhance their personal lives.

The survey results for ESL programs that do not offer NLL instruction are summarized in Table 2 (for public-supported programs) and Table 3 (for private non-profit programs).

Table 2. Public-Supported Programs Offering ESL But Not Native Language Literacy

	Alexandria Adult Basic Education	*Arlington Employment and Education Program (REEP)*	*Fairfax County Public Schools Adult Education*
1 How program meets needs of non-literate adults	English literacy class (typically about 150 hours of instruction for non-literate students) before first level ESL	"literacy track" ESL classes	English literacy class (at least 100 hours of instruction for non-literate) before ESL
2 Progress of non-literate students	English learning delayed up to a year by taking literacy classes	slower progress; have to repeat more classes	lower rate of success, but depends on the teacher
3 Reasons for not offering literacy instruction in native languages	diversity of student body -- program serves students from 50 countries and most literacy students are Africans from a variety of countries, students want to learn English	not enough non-literate students to offer classes in a native language, only 1% of students have had no schooling	limited student demand, a church-supported literacy program in the county "folded", demand for ESL is so great that program resources must be focused there

Table 3. Private Non-Profit Programs Offering ESL But Not Native Language Literacy

	Hogar Hispano (Catholic Charities) (Fairfax County)	*Literacy Council of Northern Virginia*	*Spanish Education Development Center (SED) (D.C.)*	*Sacred Heart Adult Education Center (D.C.)*
1 How program meets needs of non-literate adults	students are placed in an English literacy class or low basic ESL class if they have less than 8 years of education	one-on-one literacy tutoring in English is preferred for lowest-level students, but some opt for ESL classes because waiting list is shorter	sometimes students are enrolled in regular ESL classes, but they are urged to attend a literacy program elsewhere	students are placed in ESL classes that do not use much written material; the program recently received a grant to develop an English literacy program
2 Progress of non-literate students	slower, more drop-outs due to poor study skills and attitudes toward learning	director has no data	not very good	not as good as other ESL students
3 Reasons for not offering literacy instruction in native languages	lack of qualified instructors; "since we're welcoming them into the US community, we might as well teach them English"	insufficient volunteer teachers to meet the demand for programs already offered	used to offer Spanish literacy, but demand was not high; building space used for Spanish literacy was given up to a new ESL program using computers	lack of financial support and lack of qualified volunteers to serve as instructors; can't even meet the demand for ESL

Virtually all of the ESL program directors agree that low-literacy adults have an especially difficult time in ESL classes. This information is consistent with the survey reports of Gillespie (1994) and LaLyre (1995) and the findings of Brown (1996) that students lacking NLL perform poorly in the ESL classroom. The director of Hogar Hispano in Fairfax County observed that such students often drop out due to poor study skills and poor attitudes toward learning.

The ESL programs face an extremely high demand for ESL instruction, and all three of the publicly-supported programs in Virginia have to turn away or wait-list ESL students. An administrator for the Fairfax County program reported that resources could not be devoted to

NLL instruction because "other demands are too great." She also observed that the students who could benefit from NLL instruction often are not interested, and she recalled that a church-supported NLL program in Fairfax had closed because of insufficient student demand. The coordinator of the adult basic education program in Alexandria similarly reported that students want to study English immediately. Furthermore, the immigrant population served in Alexandria is extremely diverse, with students coming from more than 50 countries; most of Alexandria's low-literacy ESL students are from countries in Africa and do not share a common language. An administrator in Arlington similarly reported that there would not be enough students in Arlington County to fill NLL classes. All three of the public-supported ESL programs in Virginia offer intensive literacy-track ESL classes for students with limited NLL skills.

Administrators of the non-profit ESL programs rely on volunteer instructors; those not offering NLL instruction report either that they do not have the resources to do so or that the demand for NLL instruction in any one language is not sufficiently high to justify a program. The Spanish Education Development Center (SED) in D.C. once offered NLL instruction; however, due to limited enrollment, SED decided to rededicate the space used for that program to a new ESL computer lab. SED now urges low-literacy students to attend a literacy program elsewhere before enrolling in an ESL class. The Literacy Council of Northern Virginia urges low-literacy students to work one-on-one with a tutor (in English) rather than enroll in an ESL class. However, many students ignore this advice, because the waiting list for tutors is so long. Hogar Hispano, a non-profit program in Fairfax County, offers special ESL classes for low-

literacy adults, and the Sacred Heart Adult Education Center in Washington is in the process of developing an ESL literacy program.

Conclusion

It is hard for students lacking NLL to succeed in ESL classes. For students who are impatient to begin learning English, an ESL literacy class may be the best option; moreover, for many students who speak a language other than Spanish, an ESL literacy class may be the only feasible option. However, a student who has very low literacy skills, or who is apprehensive about going to school, may be much better served by a NLL class. Unfortunately, opportunities to obtain NLL instruction in DC and suburban Virginia are very limited, even for Spanish speakers.

Spanish-speaking Immigrants living in Northwest Washington are served by the NLL programs at Carlos Rosario and Language ETC. The publicly-supported Carlos Rosario program, however, lacks sufficient resources to accept all the students who seek admission. The Language ETC program is currently able to accept all NLL students who ask to enroll, but the students turned away by Carlos Rosario do not necessarily find their way to this program. Language ETC is dependent on charitable donations and the services of volunteers. If the availability of its NLL program were more widely known, it too might be forced to turn away some students. In Northern Virginia, NLL in Spanish is offered by two very small programs in Arlington and Alexandria. While students are not being turned away from either program, most adults who could benefit from these programs are not likely to be aware of their existence, since neither is widely publicized.

There is good reason to believe that literacy in one's native language makes it easier for a non-native speaker to attain literacy in English. It is not impossible, however, for non-literate adults to achieve success in ESL classes without first becoming literate in their native languages. Moreover, there are practical reasons why it is difficult for publicly-funded programs serving an entire city or county to devote resources to NNL classes. These reasons do not necessarily apply to programs run by religious or charitable organizations, which are often created to serve a particular local ethnic community. Private non-profit organizations should certainly give greater consideration to offering NLL literacy instruction, not only because NLL enables students to progress more effectively in ESL classes but also because NLL enhances the personal lives of immigrants by allowing them to participate more fully in their local communities and maintain ties with family members living in their home countries.

The present study did not uncover any information about NLL programs for immigrants who speak languages other than Spanish. A more intensive search for information about NLL programs in the Vietnamese, Korean, Middle Eastern, and other large immigrant communities in the metropolitan area might yield valuable information about the usefulness of NLL instruction for non-Spanish speaking immigrants, particularly those whose native languages do not use the Latin alphabet. Another limitation of this study is that the importance of NLL to students was explored only indirectly through questionnaires addressed to program administrators. Much richer information could be obtained from personal interviews with students. This information could better help governmental authorities and charitable organizations ascribe an accurate value to NLL instruction. Finally, the study left out a substantial segment of the greater metropolitan

area -- suburban Maryland. Research regarding this geographic area would round out this study's inventory of NLL program offerings in the region.

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Appendix C -- Programs Participating in Survey

Programs Offering Native Language Literacy Instruction

[Empowering Families through Literacy]
Arlington Public Schools

Hispanic Orientation and Education Program
Alexandria Department of Human Services

[Carlos Rosario International Public Charter School]
Washington, D.C.

Language Education and Technology Center ("Language ETC")
Washington, D.C.

ESL Programs Not Offering Native Language Literacy Instruction

Alexandria Adult Basic Education
Alexandria Public Schools

Arlington Education and Employment Program ("REEP")
Arlington Public Schools

Office of Adult ESL
Fairfax County Public Schools

Literacy Council of Northern Virginia
Falls Church, Virginia

Sacred Heart Adult Education Center
Washington, D.C.

Spanish Education Development ("SED") Center
Washington, D.C.

Native Language Literacy Survey
Survey A – For Programs that Offer Native Language Literacy Instruction

1. How many years has your literacy program been in operation? _____

2. In what language(s) do you offer literacy instruction?

_____

3. What level of reading and writing proficiency do your students typically achieve in their native languages in your program?
   ___ below 3rd grade
   ___ 3rd grade
   ___ 6th grade
   ___ above 6th grade

4. What was the impetus for initiation of your literacy program? (Please rank those that apply in order of importance, with #1 being the most important reason.)

   ___ non-literate students were failing in ESL classes

   ___ non-literate students were failing in literacy classes taught in English

   ___ prospective students expressed a desire to achieve native language literacy

   ___ community leaders expressed a desire for native language literacy courses

   ___ Other

   _____

5. What reasons do your students express for wanting to achieve native language literacy (NLL)? (Please rank those that apply in order of importance, with #1 being the most important reason.)

   ___ need NLL to succeed in ESL classes

   ___ want NLL to write letters to family and friends in native country

   ___ want NLL to communicate better with children's teachers and school authorities

   ___ want NNL to participate more fully in church services/read the Bible

   ___ want NNL in order to participate more fully in other ways in the local community

   e.g., _____

6. Who are your literacy instructors? (Check all that apply.)

___ professionally trained literacy specialists who speak English as a first language
___ professionally trained literacy specialists who speak the students' native language as a first language
___ salaried instructors who are not professionally trained and speak English as a first language
___ salaried instructors who are not professionally trained and speak the students' native language as a first language
___ volunteers who speak English as a first language
___ volunteers who speak the students' native language as a first language

___ other _____

7. If your instructors are not professionally trained, how many hours of training do you provide to them before they begin teaching (not including mere observation of teaching by others)?

___ less than 5 hours
___ 5 to 10 hours
___ more than 10 hours

8. What are your sources for NLL materials? (Check all that apply.)

___ materials created commercially in the U.S. for children
___ materials created commercially in the U.S. for adults
___ materials created abroad
___ materials designed specifically for your program

9. How many students are currently enrolled in your literacy program?

___ less than 5
___ 5 to 10
___ 11 to 20
___ 21 to 40
___ more than 40

10. How large are the classes?

___ each student is tutored individually
___ less than 5 students
___ 5 to 10 students
___ 11 to 20 students
___ more than 20 students

11. Is your program able to meet student demand in the languages that you offer instruction?

___ yes, we enroll everyone who applies during our enrollment period
___ no, we have to turn students away or put them on a waiting list

12. If your NLL students also study English, when do they receive that instruction?

___ students begin learning English in their NLL classes
___ students take separate ESL classes while they are taking NLL classes
___ students take ESL classes after they reach a certain proficiency level in their NLL classes, typically the equivalent of about grade _____

13. Why do you believe NLL instruction is preferable to literacy instruction in English? (Please rank the reasons you agree with in order of importance.)

___ it is too difficult for adults to learn to read in a foreign language

___ it is important for our students to become literate in their native languages whether or not they learn English

___ other _____

14. How is your program supported financially? (Please rank in order of importance, with #1 being the largest source of funding.)

___ city/county government
___ church
___ foundation grants
___ other non-profit organizations
___ donations from individuals
___ tuition

15. What is the name and address of your program?

_____

_____

16. Please provide your name, title in the program, and telephone number

_____

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS SURVEY.

Please return your form to Cynthia Ingersoll, scheining4@cs.com, 4021 Ellicott Street, Alexandria VA 22304, (703) 820-6188

Any additional information or comments would be much appreciated.

Native Language Literacy Survey

Survey B – For ESL programs that do not offer native language literacy instruction

1. What is the name and address of your program?

_____

_____

2. Do you have non-literate adults coming to you for ESL instruction?

___ yes
___ no

3. Do you enroll non-literate adults into your ESL classes?

___ yes
___ no
___ sometimes, depending on _____

3a. If you enroll them, how do you teach them?

___ place them in an English literacy class
___ place them in an English class that does not use written materials
___ place them in a regular English class
___ other
_____

3b. If you enroll them, do these students succeed in learning English?

___ much less than other ESL students
___ less than other ESL students
___ as well as other ESL students
___ better than other ESL students

3c. If you do not enroll them, where do you send them for ESL or literacy instruction?

_____

4. Would you like to be able to offer native language literacy (NLL) instruction to non-literate adults?

___ yes
___ no
___ maybe

5. If you would like to offer NLL instruction, what factors prevent you from doing so?

___ lack of financial or political support for administration of program
___ lack of teaching facilities
___ lack of qualified instructors
___ other

_____

6. Please provide your name, title in the program, and telephone number

_____

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS SURVEY.

Please return your form to Cynthia Ingersoll, scheining4@cs.com,
4021 Ellicott Street, Alexandria VA 22304, (703) 820-6188